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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 000595

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: PARLIAMENTARY OBSTACLES  
TO POST-2010 DECISION

REF: THE HAGUE 577

Classified By: Political Economic Counselor Andrew C. Mann for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

[11.](#) (S) SUMMARY. After four months of private discussions over whether and how to extend Dutch military commitment to Afghanistan beyond 2010, the divide within the ruling coalition went public with a late night parliamentary debate September 30. Coalition-members Labor Party (PvdA) and Christian Unie (CU) put down a marker against any Dutch military involvement in Uruzgan after 2010. Parliament is to vote on several competing resolutions October 6. A majority will likely support a resolution urging the Cabinet to take into account "that the Netherlands would not take on a new mission in Uruzgan after 2010." END SUMMARY.

PUTTING DOWN THE MARKERS  
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[12.](#) (S) Recent public statements by Prime Minister Balkenende (Christian Democrat Party - CDA) and Foreign Minister Verhagen (CDA) indicate they are testing the debate on Afghanistan in public fora. The comments reflect the kind of post-2010 Dutch engagement in Afghanistan that senior Dutch officials have been relaying to Post privately over the last several months - retaining the PRT in Uruzgan with force protection elements, F-16s, helicopters, enablers, and trainers. Verhagen argued that "if the Netherlands wants to continue being a player on the world scene and having a say at the table, it cannot shirk taking responsibility for Afghanistan" and Balkenende re-iterated that "not all the experience the Dutch have gained in reconstruction and training should be wasted."

[13.](#) (U) Coalition member PvdA responded quickly and negatively. In opposition to a new mission, PvdA foreign affairs spokesman Martijn van Dam stated, "The agreement was very clear: we will withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2010." He said the PvdA may be prepared to talk about limited involvement, such as the deployment of F-16s to Kandahar and training Afghan army and police; "however, the heavy mission in which troops operate in the front-line must end. And a PRT is heavy." PvdA leader, deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Wouter Bos emphasized that "there is no room to leave troops behind in Uruzgan; we will not extend the mission. The last soldier will leave Uruzgan in December 2010."

14. (C) The GreenLeft Party requested a debate to clarify where the Cabinet stood on the question of what happens in Afghanistan post-2010. (NOTE: This request was highly unusual. Parliament waits until the Cabinet considers an issue and recommends particular action, which is then submitted to Parliament for approval. This debate occurred before the Cabinet had decided what to do. END NOTE.) The debate, on September 30, was initially civil and indications were that a compromise, to let the Cabinet continue its deliberations of the issue in private, had been tentatively agreed by the coalition parties. Balkenende admitted the public statements had not been the correct approach and the internal Cabinet process should continue to bring a decision to a conclusion; then Parliament could consider the matter. However, when Verhagen elaborated on possible missions to be considered and mused about the need to stay in Uruzgan, the CU and PvdA, as well as other opposition parties, responded with resolutions not to engage in a new mission in Uruzgan after 2010.

#### Resolutions

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15. (C) In what was clearly a coordinated effort, the Labor Party and Christian Unie offered a resolution that referred the decision back to the Cabinet but urged it to take into consideration that the previous decision to extend the Dutch mission in Uruzgan through 2010 had been based on the understanding "that the Netherlands would not take on a new mission in Uruzgan after 2010." Gert Wilder's party, the PVV, offered a resolution calling for the earliest possible

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termination of the entire Dutch military mission in Afghanistan. Other resolutions were offered to force the Cabinet to make its decision on Afghanistan by March 1. Parliament will vote on the resolutions Oct. 6, and the Labor/CU resolution will likely pass overwhelmingly.

#### COMMENT

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16. (S) We believe Balkenende will do everything possible to delay a cabinet decision until he has either exhausted all possibilities or succeeded in getting Bos to lead the PvdA in support of some sort of Afghanistan mission. We have been told, however, that FM Verhagen is immensely frustrated, and may resign if Parliament restricts the Cabinet from considering some sort of Uruzgan deployment after 2010. (Presumably he would be replaced and the government would continue.) The MFA Political Director, Pieter de Gooijer, is working on language for the Cabinet that would buy time for further deliberation.

17. (S) The opposition, and now two members of the 3-party ruling coalition, is sticking to the mantra "We said we would leave Uruzgan in 2010 and we will." The opposition is not considering how changed conditions on the ground might necessitate a fresh look at the Dutch deployment. Unfortunately, a majority in Parliament appears poised to vote against a post-2010 Uruzgan deployment -- though not necessarily shutting the door to a mission elsewhere. The pending Labor/CU resolution would not restrict the Cabinet from considering some sort of continued Dutch presence in Uruzgan, and the resolution's likely passage would not bind the Cabinet to any particular course of action. It will, however, put the Cabinet on notice that a strong parliamentary majority oppose the Uruzgan mission. It will also make it more difficult for the MPs to consider an Uruzgan mission of some sort in the future after publicly stating their opposition. We are continuing to take soundings and will follow up with a recommended engagement strategy.

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